



House approves \$1.2 trillion package of spending bills

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House approved a \$1.2 trillion package of spending bills on Friday just a few hours before funding for some key federal agencies is set to expire, a long overdue action nearly six months into the budget year that will push any threats of a government shut-down to the fall.

The bill passed by a vote of 286-134 and now moves to the Senate, where leadership hopes for a final vote later Friday. More than 70% of the money would go to defense.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., brought the bill up under a streamlined process that required two-thirds support for approval. The vote was exceedingly tight, a reflection of anger among Republicans over the content of the package and the speed with which it was brought to a vote.



Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, R-La., speaks at the Capitol in Washington, Wednesday, March 20, 2024.

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Associated Press
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LIVE ENTERTAINMENT 7 DAYS A WEEK							PROFESSIONAL COMPLIMENTARY PICTURES ON TUESDAY AND FRIDAY
SUNDAY: MARRYBELL MADURO SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm	MONDAY: ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	TUESDAY: JEAN PAUL SAXOPHONIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	WEDNESDAY: EDDIE KROON SINGER 4:00 - 6:00pm MAILLEYN ALVARADO VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm KARAOKE 9:00 - 11:00pm	THURSDAY: MARRYBELL MADURO SINGER 6:30 - 8:30pm Happy Hour 12-1 / 4-6 / 9-10	FRIDAY: RICKY THOMAS GUITARIST 7:00 - 9:00pm PREMIUM BRANDS	SATURDAY: EDDIE KROON SINGER 4:00 - 6:00pm ANGELA FLORES VIOLINIST 6:30 - 8:30pm	

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House approves \$1.2 trillion package of spending bills

Continued from Front

Signaling more trouble ahead, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., initiated an effort to oust Johnson as the House began the vote but held off on further action until the House returns in two weeks. It's the same tool that was used last year to remove the last Republican speaker, Kevin McCarthy of California. The vote breakdown showed 101 Republicans voting for the bill and 112 voting against it. Meanwhile, 185 Democrats voted for the bill and 22 against.

Lawmakers could still miss the midnight deadline for funding the government as action in the Senate could take time. But the practical impact in the near term would be minimal. With most federal workers off duty over the weekend and many government services funded through earlier legislation, a shutdown would mostly pass without incident unless matters dragged into Monday. "Democrats and Republicans have about 13 hours to work together to make sure the government stays open. That's not going to be easy," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said as the Senate opened for business. "We will have to work together — and avoid unnecessary delays."

Johnson broke up this fiscal year's spending bills into two parts as House Republicans revolted against what has become an annual practice of asking them to vote for one massive, complex bill called an omnibus with little time to review it or face a shutdown. Johnson viewed that as a breakthrough, calling the bill "the best achievable outcome in a divided government."

Still, the package was clearly unpopular with most Republicans, who viewed it as containing too few of their policy priorities and as spending too much.

"The bottom line is that this is a complete and utter surrender," said Rep. Eric Burlison, R-Mo. The opponents particularly took issue with fellow Republicans voting for the bill and the actions of House GOP leadership.



Members of the conservative House Freedom Caucus gather at a news conference to denounce the spending package being voted on for the current budget year, at the Capitol in Washington, Friday, March 22, 2024.

Associated Press

Rep. Andy Ogles, R-Tenn., went so far as to say "it's clear that the Democrats own the speaker's gavel." It's taken lawmakers six months into the current fiscal year to get near the finish line on government funding, the process slowed by conservatives who pushed for more policy mandates and steeper spending cuts than a Democratic-led Senate or White House would consider. The impasse required several short-term, stopgap spending bills to keep agencies funded as negotiations continued.

Rep. Kay Granger, the Republican chair of the House Appropriations Committee, stepped down from that role after the vote. She said she would stay on the committee to provide advice and lead as a teacher for colleagues when needed.

Democratic leaders sold the bill to members by emphasizing that they were able to hold the line against hundreds of policy mandates

and deep spending cuts. "This is a good result for the American people in terms of standing up for their health, their safety, their education, their national security protection and of course, above all else, their economic well-being," Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries said. The first package of full-year spending bills, which funded the departments of Veterans Affairs, Agriculture and the Interior, among others, cleared Congress two weeks ago with just hours to spare before funding expired for those agencies.

When combining the two packages, discretionary spending for the budget year will come to about \$1.66 trillion. That does not include programs such as Social Security and Medicare, or financing the country's rising debt.

To win over support from Republicans, Johnson touted some of the spending increases secured for about 8,000 more detention beds

for migrants awaiting their immigration proceedings or removal from the country. That's about a 24% increase from current levels. Also, GOP leadership highlighted more money to hire about 2,000 Border Patrol agents. After the vote, having clearly heard his right flank's concerns, Johnson said he would be in active discussions over the next two weeks on a plan to highlight differences between the two parties on "the catastrophe at the Southern border that is killing countless Americans." He said bills would be introduced to fix the problem. Democrats, meanwhile, are boasting of a \$1 billion increase for Head Start programs and new child care centers for military families. They also played up a \$120 million increase in funding for cancer research and a \$100 million increase for Alzheimer's research.

"Make no mistake, we had to work under very difficult top-line numbers and fight

off literally hundreds of extreme Republican poison pills from the House, not to mention some unthinkable cuts," said Sen. Patty Murray, the Democratic chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "But at the end of the day this is a bill that will keep our country and our families moving forward."

Sen. Susan Collins, the top Republican on that committee, appealed to her GOP colleagues by stating that the bill's spending on non-defense programs actually decreases even before accounting for inflation. She called the package "conservative" and "carefully drafted."

"These bills are not big spending bills that are wildly out of scope," Collins said.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called on the Senate to pass the spending bill as quickly as possible. "This bill is a compromise," she said. "No side got everything it wanted." The spending in the bill largely tracks with an agreement that then-Speaker McCarthy worked out with the White House in May 2023, which restricted spending for two years and suspended the debt ceiling into January 2025 so the federal government could continue paying its bills.

Shalanda Young, director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, told lawmakers that last year's agreement, which became the Fiscal Responsibility Act, will save the federal government about \$1 trillion over the coming decade. Members of both parties expressed frustration with how long the process has taken and how the end result was what so many had predicted. They warned all along that Republicans would not get the vast majority of policy mandates they were seeking or cut spending further than what McCarthy and the White House had agreed upon last year.

"People were living in a dream world thinking, 'Well, we're going to something different than what McCarthy had an agreement with the president on,'" said Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb. □

Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene files motion to oust Speaker Mike Johnson

By LISA MASCARO,
FARNOUSH AMIRI and
STEPHEN GROVES
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Mike Johnson is at risk of being ousted after hard-right Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene filed a motion to vacate on Friday in the middle of a House vote on a \$1.2 trillion package to keep the government open.

It's the same political dynamic that removed the last Republican speaker, Kevin McCarthy, just five months ago when far-right conservatives revolted over his compromise with Democrats to prevent a federal shutdown. But this one faces steeper odds with less GOP support.

The House is scheduled to leave town for a two-week spring recess at the end of Friday's session, and it's doubtful any vote on removing Johnson, of Louisiana, would be imminent.

"Speaker Johnson always listens to the concerns of members but is focused on governing," spokesman Raj Shah said.

"He will continue to push conservative legislation that secures our border,



Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., talks at a campaign rally March 9, 2024, in Rome Ga. House Speaker Mike Johnson is at risk of being ousted. Greene filed a "motion to vacate" Friday, March 22, in the middle of a House vote on a \$1.2 trillion package to keep the government open.

Associated Press

strengthens our national defense and demonstrates how we'll grow our majority."

Under the rules, any member can make the motion privileged, which would require leaders to schedule a vote within two legislative days. But it can also simply sit until lawmakers return next month.

Greene, of Georgia, said she was issuing a "warning" to Johnson but did not indicate a timetable for her next move.

"We've started the clock to start the process to elect a new speaker," she said on the Capitol steps.

Yet even the threat of removal, the ultimate punishment for a speaker, will

hang over Johnson's young speakership, just months on the job particularly as he turns next to passing funding to support Ukraine that far-right Republicans oppose.

No speaker had been removed this way until McCarthy's dramatic ouster last fall, a swift, stunning and chaotic episode that

essentially shuttered the House chamber for weeks as Republicans searched for a new speaker.

Greene is a leading ally of the Republicans' presumed 2024 presidential nominee, former president Donald Trump, and McCarthy, of California, was toppled by a similar contingent of far-right Republicans led at the time by Trump ally Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida.

The Georgia congresswoman spoke vehemently against House passage of the government funding bill, and she has warned she would try to remove the speaker if he pushes ahead with a package to support Ukraine as it battles Russia's invasion.

Johnson has refused to put a \$95 billion Senate-passed national security package with Ukraine funds to a House vote, but nevertheless he promised to fund Ukraine as the a next priority. The removal threat against him now puts any votes to help Ukraine in potential jeopardy.

With the most narrow majority in modern times, Johnson has a weak grasp on his Republicans in the House. □

Requiring ugly images of smoking's harm on cigarettes won't breach First Amendment, court says

By KEVIN MCGILL
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A federal requirement that cigarette packs and advertising include graphic images demonstrating the effects of smoking including pictures of smoke-damaged lungs and feet blackened by diminished blood flow does not violate the First Amendment, an appeals court ruled Thursday. The ruling from a three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was a partial victory for federal regulators seeking to toughen warning labels. But the court kept alive a tobacco industry chal-

lenge of the rule, saying a lower court should review whether it was adopted in accordance with the federal Administrative Procedure Act, which governs the development of regulations.

The 5th Circuit panel rejected industry arguments that the rule violates free speech rights or that it requires images and lettering that take up so much space that they overcome branding and messaging on packages and advertisements. The ruling overturns a lower court order from a federal district court in Texas, where a judge found the requirements vi-

olate the First Amendment. "We disagree," Judge Jerry Smith wrote for the 5th Circuit panel. "The warnings are both factual and uncontroversial."

While reversing the lower court's First Amendment finding, the panel noted that the judge had not ruled on the APA-based challenge. It sent the case back to the district court to consider that issue.

The images in question include a picture of a woman with a large growth on her neck and the caption "WARNING: Smoking causes head and neck cancer." Another shows a man's chest with a long

scar from surgery and a different warning: "Smoking can cause heart disease and strokes by clogging arteries."

Nearly 120 countries around the world have adopted larger, graphic warning labels. Studies from those countries suggest the image-based labels are more effective than text warnings at publicizing smoking risks and encouraging smokers to quit.

In addition to Smith, who was nominated to the court by former President Ronald Reagan, the panel included judges Jennifer Walker Elrod, nominated by George W. Bush, and

James Graves, nominated by Barack Obama. □



This image provided by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Thursday, Aug. 15, 2019, shows proposed cigarette warning labels.

Associated Press

More than 100 iconic cherry trees in Washington are being cut down

By ASHRAF KHALIL

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The sun is setting on Stumpy, the gnarled old cherry tree that has become a social media phenom. This year's cherry blossom festivities in Washington will be the last for Stumpy and more than 100 other cherry trees that will be cut down as part of a multiyear restoration of their Tidal Basin home.

Starting in early summer, crews will begin working to replace the crumbling sea-wall around the Tidal Basin, the area around the Jefferson Memorial with the highest concentration of cherry trees. The work has been long overdue, as the deterioration, combined with rising sea levels, has resulted in Potomac waters regularly surging over the barriers. The twice-daily floods at high tide not only cover some of the pedestrian paths, they also regularly soak some of the cherry trees' roots. The \$133 million project to rebuild and reinforce the sea wall will take about three years, said Mike Litterst, National Park Service spokesman for the National Mall.

"It's certainly going to



The Jefferson Memorial is visible as visitors to the Tidal Basin walk along an area as cherry trees enter peak bloom this week in Washington.

benefit the visitor experience, and that's very important to us," Litterst said. "But most of all, it's going to benefit the cherry trees, who right now are every day, twice a day, seeing their roots inundated with the brackish water of the Tidal Basin." Litterst said entire stretches of trees to the water, as wide as 100 yards, or 90 meters, have been lost and can't be replaced "until we fix the underlying

cause of what killed them in the first place."

Stumpy remains alive, if in rough shape. Plans call for 140 cherry trees and 300 trees total to be removed and turned into mulch. When the project is concluded, 277 cherry trees will be planted as replacements. The mulch will protect the roots of surviving trees from foot traffic and break down over time into nutrient-rich soil, "so it's a

good second life" for the trees being cut down, Litterst said. The National Cherry Blossom Festival is widely considered to be the start of the tourist season in the nation's capital. Organizers expect 1.5 million people to view the pink and white blossoms this year, the most since the coronavirus pandemic. Large numbers of cherry blossom fans have already been drawn to the area as the trees entered

Associated Press

peak bloom on March 17, several days earlier than expected.

Its legacy has spawned T-shirts, a calendar and a fanbase. News of Stumpy's final spring has prompted people to leave flowers and bourbon and had one Reddit user threatening to chain themselves to the trunk to save the tree.

The regular flooding at the Tidal Basin sea levels have risen about a foot since the the seawall was built in the early 1990s is just one of the ways climate change has impacted the cherry trees. Rising global temperatures and warmer winters have caused peak bloom to creep earlier in the calendar.

This year's peak bloom, when 70% of the city's 3,700 cherry trees will be flowering, was originally predicted to start around Saturday but ended up being declared on March 17. By comparison, the 2013 peak bloom began on April 9. Leslie Frattaroli, national resources program manager for the Park Service, told The Associated Press in February that peak bloom could regularly come in the middle of March by 2050. □

State Farm discontinuing 72,000 home policies in California in latest blow to state insurance market

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— State Farm will discontinue coverage for 72,000 houses and apartments in California starting this summer, the insurance giant

said this week, nine months after announcing it would not issue new home policies in the state

The Illinois-based company, California's largest

insurer, cited soaring costs, the increasing risk of catastrophes like wildfires and outdated regulations as reasons it won't renew the policies on 30,000 houses and 42,000 apartments, the Bay Area News Group reported Thursday.

"This decision was not made lightly and only after careful analysis of State Farm General's financial health, which continues to be impacted by inflation, catastrophe exposure, reinsurance costs, and the limitations of working with in decades-old insurance regulations," the company said in a statement Wednesday.

"State Farm General takes seriously our responsibility to maintain adequate

claims-paying capacity for our customers and to comply with applicable financial solvency laws," it continued. "It is necessary to take these actions now." The move comes as California's elected insurance commissioner undertakes a yearlong overhaul of home insurance regulations aimed at calming the state's imploding market by giving insurers more latitude to raise premiums while extracting commitments from them to extend coverage in fire-risk areas, the news group said.

The California Department of Insurance said State Farm will have to answer question from regulators about its decision to discontinue coverage.

"One of our roles as the insurance regulator is to hold insurance companies accountable for their words and deeds," Deputy Insurance Commissioner Michael Soller said. "We need to be confident in State Farm's strategy moving forward to live up to its obligations to its California customers."

It was unclear whether the department would launch an investigation.

Last June, State Farm said it would stop accepting applications for all business and personal lines of property and casualty insurance, citing inflation, a challenging reinsurance market and "rapidly growing catastrophe exposure." □



Homes leveled by the Camp Fire line a development on Edgewood Lane in Paradise, Calif., on Nov. 12, 2018.

Associated Press

Russia launches sweeping attack on Ukraine's power sector, a sign of possible escalation

By HANNA ARHIROVA and JIM HEINTZ

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia unleashed one of its most devastating attacks against Ukraine's electric sector on Friday, an aerial assault it said was retaliation for recent strikes inside Russia and which could signal an escalation of the war just days after President Vladimir Putin cemented his grip on power in a pre-ordained election.

Many Ukrainians were plunged into darkness across several cities, at least five people were killed, and damage to the country's largest hydroelectric plant briefly cut off power to a nuclear plant that has been a safety risk throughout the war.

Russia fired off more than 60 exploding drones and 90 missiles in what Ukrainian officials described as the most brutal attack against its energy infrastructure since the full-scale war began in early 2022.

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, sustained the most damage, officials said, and the attack came a day after Russia had fired 31 missiles into the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been urging Western allies for



In this photo provided by Telegram Channel of Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, smoke and fire rise over the Dnipro hydroelectric power plant after Russian attacks in Dnipro, Ukraine, Friday, March 22, 2024.

weeks to provide it with additional air-defense systems and ammunition, a period in which \$60 billion in U.S. aid has been held up by divisions in Congress.

"With Russian missiles, there are no delays, like with aid packages to our state," Zelenskyy said. "It is important to understand the cost of delays and postponed decisions."

Russia's defense minis-

try called Friday attacks "strikes of retribution." Ukraine has increased shelling of Russia's Belgorod region along its northeast border and has launched drone strikes targeting Russian oil refineries and other energy facilities.

Ukraine's latest strike inside Russia on Friday killed one and injured at least three, according to local officials. Putin has described Ukrai-

nian attacks on Belgorod and other regions as an effort to frighten residents and derail the highly orchestrated election that ended Sunday. And he vowed to strike back.

The day after he declared victory, Putin said Russia would seek to create a buffer zone inside eastern Ukraine to help protect against long-range strikes and cross-border raids.

Russia has made progress on the battlefield in recent months against exhausted Ukrainian troops struggling with a shortage of manpower and ammunition along the front line that stretches over 1,000 kilometers (620 miles).

When Putin invaded in 2022, he called it a "special military operation," and his officials have mostly eschewed the word "war." But in a change of rhetoric Friday that may herald a new escalation, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told a Russian newspaper that "when the collective West became a participant in this on the side of Ukraine, for us it already became a war."

In the winter of 2022-23, Russia targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, causing frequent blackouts across the country. Many in Ukraine and the West expected that Russia might repeat this strategy this winter, but Russia instead focused its strikes on Ukraine's defense industries.

While launching the strikes, Russia has combined sophisticated ballistic and cruise missiles with waves of cheap Iranian-made Shahed drones in a bid to oversaturate and weaken Ukrainian air defenses. □

Associated Press

Italy's Meloni seeks symbolic compensation from suspects over deepfake porn images

ROME (AP) — Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni has been asked to testify in court July 2 in the trial of two men who are accused of making deepfake pornographic images using her face and posting them online.

Meloni, who is listed as an injured party in the trial in Sassari in Sardinia, is seeking 100,000 euros (\$108,212) in symbolic damages and will donate any award to an Interior Ministry fund for women victims of domestic violence, her attorney Maria Giulia Marongiu said in an email Friday to The Associated Press.

"The crime in question is particularly odious, as it allegedly involves the uploading of fabricated pornographic images that could affect any unsuspecting woman

with damaging consequences for her reputation and private life," Marongiu said.

"Given the role played by Giorgia Meloni, it seemed all the more fitting that she should be a civil plaintiff, in the hope that this would be useful in raising awareness of the issue also on behalf of the many women who often remain defenseless." According to the ANSA news agency, Italy's postal police in 2020 identified the father and son who allegedly uploaded the deepfake images to a U.S.-based porn site by tracing the data to one of their cell phones.

At the time Meloni was not premier, but head of her Brothers of Italy party. □



Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni arrives in the courtyard of the Italian government office Chigi Palace, to meet Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, in Rome, Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024.

Associated Press

Refugee camps in Chad are overcrowded and running out of aid, and Sudanese refugees keep coming

By JSARH NGARNDEY UL-RICH and JESSICA DONATI
 Associated Press

METCHE CAMP, Chad (AP)

— Overcrowded refugee camps in eastern Chad are set to run out of money soon, exacerbating a dire humanitarian crisis caused by the spillover from a deadly conflict in Sudan, the United Nations said.

More than a million people in Chad, including refugees, face losing access to lifesaving aid unless more funding is raised to help, the U.N. World Food Program said this month.

The devastating conflict between feuding generals in Sudan has killed more than 5,000 people there and displaced over 5 million, the United Nations said. In Chad, refugee numbers are at a 20-year high. The U.N. has warned that the conflict is on course to become the world's worst hunger crisis, with a third of Sudan's 18 million people facing acute food insecurity already.

At refugee camps in eastern Chad, lack of clean drinking water and sanitation is causing dangerous



Sudanese refugees displaced by the conflict in Sudan gather to receive food staples from aid agencies at the Metche Camp in eastern Chad Tuesday, March 5, 2024.

Associated Press

diseases to spread. Doctors Without Borders said it has recorded almost 1,000 cases of hepatitis E in the camps and several pregnant women have died.

"The situation is dire in all camps," said Erneau Mondesir, the group's medical coordinator in the

region. "Without swift action to improve sanitation infrastructure and enhance people's access to clean water, we risk witnessing a surge in preventable illnesses and unnecessary loss of life."

At the Metche Camp, which is sheltering some

40,000 refugees, people are in dire need of water, food, shelter and basic sanitation. Earlier this month an Associated Press reporter saw aid workers unload sacks of grain from trucks for distribution as fierce winds blew across the rocky, sandy terrain.

Aid workers used loudspeakers to explain the work and distribute tokens among refugees. "Here we do distribution in a targeted manner," Ahmat Absakine, an aid worker with Caritas, another aid group in the region.

Water shortages are causing diseases to spread, and aid workers fear a catastrophe if supplies run out.

"The spillover from the crisis in Sudan is overwhelming an underfunded and overstretched humanitarian response in Chad. We need donors to prevent the situation from becoming an all-out catastrophe," said Pierre Honnorat, the World Food Program's top representative in Chad.

Analysts also fear the humanitarian situation could cause Chad's own political tensions to erupt. In February, opposition leader Yaya Dillo was killed in the capital. He was the president's cousin and a strong contender in the presidential election scheduled for May.

Finances and aid supplies at humanitarian operations are critically low.

Former Filipino congressman accused of masterminding a governor's murder is arrested in East Timor

MANILA, Philippines (AP)

— A former Filipino congressman accused of masterminding the killings of a provincial governor and

several others has been arrested in East Timor and will be deported to the Philippines, Philippine justice officials said Friday.



Catholic nuns visit the wake of Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo at his home in Dumaguete city, Negros Oriental province, central Philippines on Monday March 6, 2023.

Associated Press

Police arrested Arnolfo Teves Jr. while he was playing at a golf driving range Thursday in East Timor's capital of Dili, where he has tried to seek asylum, the Philippine Department of Justice said. His arrest had been sought through an Interpol red notice asking police worldwide to locate and apprehend him.

Teves is facing murder charges in connection with the killings of Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo and eight other people, including some seeking aid at his home in Pamplona town in March last year. At least 17 others, including a doctor and two army soldiers, were wounded in the attack, police said then.

At least six men armed with assault rifles and wearing military camouflage and bullet-resistant vests walked calmly into Degamo's residential compound and opened fire in an attack that was captured on security cameras. The shooters fled in three SUVs and authorities later announced the capture of a number of suspects.

Teves denied any involvement in the killing of Degamo and the other victims and said without elaborating that he was set up. The killings refocused attention on the country's bloody political conflicts, which have been exacerbated by the existence of private armies and large

numbers of illegal firearms, especially in the countryside.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. said then that the attack on Degamo, who backed his presidential candidacy, was "purely political."

Marcos commended Philippine law enforcers and their international counterparts for the arrest of Teves and said his administration will work to bring him back to the country and "spare no effort in ensuring that justice will prevail in this case." The apprehension of Teves "is a testament to the power of international cooperation," Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla said in a statement.

Aruba's Bocas: home to the rarest fossil reefs on the planet!



(Oranjestad)— If you've been to the northern coast of Aruba already, you've probably noticed how the ground differs entirely from the sandy beaches on the southern part of the island. These hard surfaces, with sharp bumps and holes are actually fossilized coral reefs, of which its growth and changes can be traced back to the last glacial period.

On May 30 2023, geoscientists, Dr. Patrick Boyden from the Marum research

faculty at the University of Bremen, Prof. dr. Alessio Rovere from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Prof. dr. Gianfranco Scicchitano, from the University of Bari Aldo Moro, presented their research on these fossilized coral reefs at the University of Aruba. Their focus for their research included studying the health and formation patterns of these coral reefs, and to investigate how these reefs have responded and can respond to fluctuating sea levels or extreme weather,

like hurricanes and tsunamis.

Through underwater and land surveillance, and 3D models of the reefs, they were able to narrow down when these formations started to take place. They were also able to track the fluctuation of sea levels during the past hundred or even thousands of years, and the effects that this fluctuation has had on the coral reefs of the windward side of Aruba.

These findings can certainly put things into perspective. The ground on which we have walked many times in the northern part of the island hold such rich history, history that dates back to a time that most of us cannot even imagine. As the scientists themselves have pointed out, these fossilized reefs on the windward side are truly an incredible and rare remnant of geological history, as they provide a clear view of how these reefs have formed.

This research is also important for the future of coral reefs on the island. By studying rising sea levels and climate impact on these coral reefs, we are able to take concrete action in protecting and preserving our coral reefs. So, if you are ever visiting one of the bocas or driving along the northern part of the island, please be conscious to help protect our natural historical remnant. Oh, and wear (coral-friendly) sunscreen! ☐



Visit the natural bridges of Aruba!

(Oranjestad)—After you've visited the Alto Vista Church, the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and the mini natural pool that is located right next to it, you're next up around the northern coast line must be the Natural Bridge. Once the largest natural bridge in the Caribbean, this bridge has been a tourist attraction for many years.

The bridge was formed during thousands of years, cut and crafted by the wild waves that crash into the coral stone walls of the coast. Before its collapse, this bridge measured 30 meters in

length and 7 meters in height, making it the biggest natural bridge in the Caribbean at the time. For many years, this site was also a frequently visited beach, as the bridge had a small opening through which the water would flow into the tiny beach.

Unfortunately in 2005, the bridge collapsed, and the little beach dried up. Despite this, this site remained a tourist attraction, with many visitors walking along the coral cliffs of the bridge to see the spectacular view of the northern coastline and the Caribbean Sea. Visitors

can also still visit the souvenir shop on the left of the bridge entrance.

While the natural bridge no longer is functional, there is now a smaller natural bridge very close. This bridge is often called the "Baby Bridge" or "Daughter Bridge". ☐



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The Caribbean's No. 1 Resort is Inspiring Tomorrow's ESG Leaders



Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Aruba welcomed its first college students and professors for its 2024 sustainability and wellness tours highlighting successful environmental, social and governance (ESG) implementation. On Feb. 29 and Mar. 1, a total of 21 students and three professors from Georgian Court University in the U.S. and from the Universidad de Bucaramanga in Colombia visited the resort for presentations and to learn in person from the staff.

Bucuti & Tara's Jeroen van Dasselaar, Sustainability & Certifications Manager, along with Natalie and Björn Brandts, Wellness Specialists, and

Melissa Alonzo, Sales & Marketing Director met with the groups. The group from Georgian Court University consisted of nursing students who were interested in learning about the realms and crossover of the resort's all-encompassing wellness program and extensive sustainability program. Business students and their professor from the Universidad de Bucaramanga focused on learning how sustainability and business success can thrive together at the Caribbean's first and only certified carbon-neutral hotel.

Preparing now for future generations

For decades the resort has welcomed guests, students, professors, researchers and even foreign dignitaries who are interested in seeing ESG successfully applied in the real world such as Bucuti & Tara's sustainability program. Upon honoring Bucuti & Tara as the sole hotel in the world to win a Global UN Climate Action Award, the United Nations declared the resort's sustainability program "highly replicable and scalable" and encouraged the world, particularly other properties, to follow. While there are case studies and

textbook chapters dedicated to this success, the resort realizes that experiencing it in action first-hand helps with knowledge sharing as the world focuses on combating climate change. Seeing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) applied in a real-world setting continues to prove inspiring for tomorrow's young ESG leaders.

Complementing sustainability is wellness, one of Bucuti & Tara's other cornerstones with the third being its focus on romance. The resort's approach is that sustainability and wellness are deeply intertwined. Sustainable practices promote environmental health, physical health, mental health, community care and long-term wellbeing for both people and the planet. Integrating sustainability into various aspects of life can lead to healthier staff and guests, community members and ecosystems. Bucuti & Tara's holistic approach piques curiosities and the resort is grateful to openly share with others how acting today will help make for better tomorrows.

Learn more by visiting Bucuti.com



Got plans this weekend? Check out the horse riding competition!

(Oranjestad)—The Aruban Horseman Organization announced its first competition for 2024, called **Feria Himno & Bandera** (Hymn & Flag Day Fair) in honor of the national holiday which took place this past Monday.

Tonight at 6pm, the first leg of the event will include a variety of Colombian gaited horses, including the Paso Fino, Trocha, Trote and Galope. On Sunday, March 24th at 4pm, there will be horse riding and amazona competitions, where younger horse riders will demonstrate their skills in the art of horse riding.

The event will take place at Villa Floralina in Moko. So put on your cowboy hat and experience a night of delight with the family! □



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Easter on Aruba: A tradition of camping

ORANJESTAD—You may notice this Sunday families setting up trailers and tents on the outskirts of beaches around the island. This is a long-standing tradition during Easter weekend, where families and friends gather in large groups and set up camp at the beach.

For this year, camping season starts on Sunday, March 24th and ends on April 7th, on Easter Day. This Aruban tradition may be nothing like what you're used to seeing. Though groups do sleep in tents and spend the entire week at their campsite, most sites have extra facilities. These facilities include trailer-kitchens and portable toilets, making camping much more comfortable—and perhaps even more luxurious.

Though camping in itself is a general custom on the island, each family/group may have their own set of traditions and routines when they go camping, like the Ras family from Paradera.

Before setting up camp, planning starts with procuring (legal) documents. These include camping permits given by the Police Corps (KPA) and contracts for toilet rentals. Do note that camping permits are especially important, because the police are bound to patrol the camping areas during the week. After obtaining a permit, groups assemble to look for and hold a spot at the beach. This is why you may notice some chairs, traffic cones or even ropes stretching across the beaches on Sat-

urday or Sunday before camping week.

Next on the list is planning the menu. The Ras family usually plans hot dogs and burgers for Thursday, and fish for Good Friday. Other than that, soup is a must, chicken and rice (Arroz con pollo) is an Aruban favorite, and for the kids, snacks like pastechi (meat pies), kroket (croquettes), cheese balls, and deviled eggs are necessary to keep them full and energized while they play all day in the blazing sun. When camping with extended family or friends, usually everyone pitches in with food and drinks. As the Ras family matriarch said: "There always someone in the kitchen cooking something up."

In terms of camp activities, these can also vary from group to group, but one activity you will not miss anywhere is dominos. Usually, every camp site has one or two domino tables ready for use, where the men usually gather and play for hours. Other than that, both children and adults play 'Mens Erger Je Niet' (Ludo), Bingo and other board games, or go fishing with lines and nets. On Easter Sunday, the main



activity for everyone, and especially the children, is egg hunting.

The Ras family matriarch told our reporter that the children traditionally decorate their own eggs before these are hidden around the camping site. They make sure to boil these eggs first, so that no messy accidents happen when painting these. After the kids find their eggs, they are usually cracked open and eaten. But the fun of egg hunting is not exclusive to children; adults may also participate too. For this, the Ras family sometimes hid golden eggs around the area, each holding big prizes, like a bottle of wine, money etc.

Besides this, families on the island may celebrate Easter weekend by walking the "Caminda di Cruz" (Sorrowful Way or Via Dolorosa) to the Alto Vista Cha-

pel located in the northern part of the island or by going to the 3 o'clock church sermon. Some groups that do not go to church but still want to pay respect on Good Friday may hold a moment of silence when the clock strikes 3pm.

And after two weeks of camping, this tradition comes to a close for the rest of the year. Groups deconstruct their sites and leave the beach premises, excited for next Easter, where they can set up camp again and enjoy the feeling of community on the beaches of Aruba.

As said before, camping during Easter vacation is a long-standing tradition for the community of Aruba. This is something that almost everyone on the island grew up with, and it remains a special occasion that feels authentic and our own! □



Don't miss out on this week's farmer's market at STR FARM Aruba!



(Oranjestad)—If you're looking for some fresh and local produce, visit the farmer's market STR FARM Aruba this today for a nice selection of fruits, veggies, local honey, and other fresh and locally produced goods!

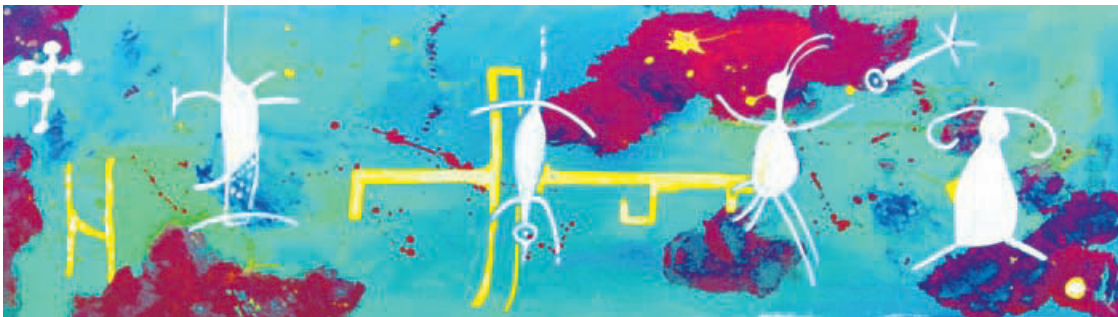
Every Saturday from 8am to 12pm, local farmers and producers gather at STR Farm Aruba to offer some of their home-made and organic products to the community. Located in Alto Vista 18F, offers a wide range of fruits and veggies, as well as honey, eggs and herbs. You

may even find homemade kimchi and local coffee!

Agriculture is a huge part of the Aruban identity, as the island has a rich history of being built by local farmers and cattlemen back in the old days. This is why these local farmer's markets are essential in maintaining the tradition of the "cunucero*" and to further promote the beauty and love that goes into farming and cultivation of home-grown food.

* "Farmer" in Papiamentu.

Episode CXII - 112 - Aruba Rock Art



NOORD—In the world, rock art is the ethnic heritage of a tribal existence and the most important visual record of humanity's ancient past that, if irretrievably damaged, is lost forever.

The visual impact of rock art made thousands of years ago is a powerful reminder of the artistic skills and sophistication of the

belief systems of our ancient ancestors. The term "rock art" refers to images depicted on immovable natural rock surfaces, such as bluff faces, cave walls, and large boulders. The painted images are called pictographs, while the pecked, carved, or incised images are called petroglyphs. Occasionally these techniques were com-

bined to produce painted petroglyphs.

Aruba has an important collection of prehistoric rock art sites: In Arikok we find the most beautiful rock art collections in Aruba.

Another interesting site is Casibari Rock formation located towards the center of the island north of Hooiberg. The rocks of this formation are composed of quartz diorite. Evidence of prehistoric rock drawings is still visible in the formation. Siribana site located in Santa Cruz district is the only known place that we can depict Petroglyph on the whole island. Petroglyphs are designs that have been scratched, carved or chiseled on the rock surface, exposing the less weathered rock, in this case lighter colored stone, which on its part gives the expression its contrast. During the



course of a few decades, this site has become almost impossible to reach. This due to the less hospitable conditions that have formed in relation to former access routes for visitors. A very difficult terrain, it has become when going up for the less experienced outdoors men. Thick xerophytic vegetation has covering a great part of what used to be old paths use by the natives to climb up to these mystical grounds since bay gone times.

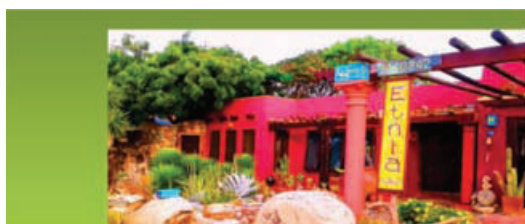
Weburi is another very interesting place situated South of Piedra Plat's Protestant Church. Weburi, as we are told stands for; boulders standing in the blowing wind. This amazing site has some minor difficulties to find the entrance, however, once the entrance is located and one has made it

inside the hollow rock bolder, the mystical drawings are all over the interior wall and can best observed.

While efforts have been made to educate the general public to participate in the conservation of our Natural Heritage, the same unfortunately cannot be said of rock-art situated in the open-air.

Etnia Nativa archaeological art works are an unique depiction of Aruba's Native Rock Art. Mystical expressions, ancestral teachings, messages from the past.

To get to know more over Aruba's and its origins, its animals and culture, we highly recommend you to book your visit for our renowned cultural encounter session has been entertaining curious participants for decades. Mail us at etnianativa03@gmail.com or WhatsApp +297 592.2702 to confirm your participation. Our facilities and activities take place close to high rise hotels.□



Article by: Etnia Nativa

Whatsapp us +297 592 2702 and book your Aruban experience

Etnia Nativa is close to the high rise hotels



Visit the island's popular cave sites!



(Oranjestad)—Among the endless sea of dark brown sand and cacti, there are two caves hidden in the outskirts of San Nicolas, in the north-eastern area of the island. These caves, The Quadirikiri cave and The Fontein Cave are open to visitors of the Arikok National Park, so if you ever decide to take an “off-road” tour in the park, be sure to visit these prehistoric caves...and be sure to bring a flashlight!

Quadirikiri Cave

Known for its two chambers accompanied by a skylight, the Quadirikiri Cave is the most popular cave among locals and tourists, as it is easy to walk through and provides great lighting for pictures.

As with all prehistoric or ancient sites, there is always a folk legend that adds to the lore and mystery of the site. The Quadirikiri cave is no different. The most well-known legend behind the cave could be considered as Aruba's first love story, as it tells the tale of the undying love between the chief's daughter and her beloved. As legend would have it, the chief disapproved of his daughter's choice of lover, as he thought him unworthy. Stubborn and filled with anger, the daughter refused to turn away her beloved.

So, the chief decided to lock her up in the Quadirikiri

Cave, in hopes that she would soon calm down and turn away her lover. Her beloved, in turn, was locked away in the Tunnel of Love (Now known as the Huliba Cave).

Through the pathways underneath the Tunnel of Love running up to the Quadirikiri cave, the two love birds found each other, and refused to let each other go. Because of their stubbornness, they both died in the Quadirikiri Cave, their ascending spirits burning two holes in the ceiling of the cave. This is why the cave has two holes through which sunlight passes through to illuminate the chamber.

Though there have been discoveries of Amerindian drawing on the wall, these have mostly been ruined by vandalism. However, the Fontein Cave further up north, provides a better glimpse in prehistoric Amerindian paintings.

Fontein Cave

Longer than the Quadirikiri Cave, the Fontein Cave contains pathways that stretch to the limestone walls further down. Here is also where prehistoric drawings can be seen. Though this cave does not have its own legend, this was speculated to have been occupied—or at least used by prehistoric Arawak settlers on the island for rituals and other spiritual

ceremonies.

The Huliba Cave/ Tunnel of Love

The Huliba Cave, formerly known as the Tunnel of Love, was once open to the public, and was the biggest and most accessible of all three caves. This cave had five chambers, including one that is heart-shaped. This cave had narrow stairs that led to long pathways deep into the cave, with a staircase leading to the exit on the other side. In one of the chambers, there used to be the carving of the Virgin Mary, put there for the protection of the cave.

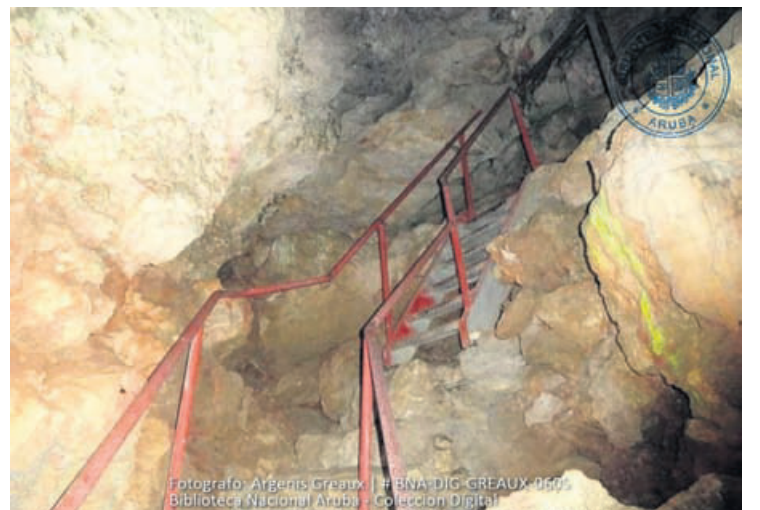
However, the Huliba Cave has been permanently closed for a few years now, as a way to preserve the bat population that lives in the cave. These Long Tongue Fruit Bats and Insect Eater Bats are very important to the ecosystem of the island. Though this cave is no longer accessible to the public, it surely is interesting to learn more about the history of these caves and the Awarak tribes that resided or utilized them.

Do note that these caves are very dark, humid, hot, and are inhabited by bats. Do wear comfortable clothing and shoes, as the pathways in these caves may be rough and bumpy, and don't forget to bring a flashlight! □

Note to visitors:

Due to heavy rainfall in the past few days, Arikok National Park has informed that they have closed the Quadirikiri Cave until further notice for the safety of visitors.

Fontein remains open from 9am to 4pm.



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 36 NASA

1 Reef vehicle materials 37 Canyon

7 Bloke sound

11 Portugal's 38 Salad place base

12 Road 39 Shortly division

13 Egotist's offense 40 Make numb

14 Price to play

15 Mirror sight president

16 Cap feature kidneys

17 Refrain bit 4 Japanese "thanks"

18 Surname in punk rock

19 Swamp croaker 7 Assert

21 Top 8 Role for Ford

22 Sudden surprise, informally

25 Even score

26 Valiant one

27 Gives an address

29 Walrus feature

33 Fido's pal

34 Coup group

35 "Law & Order: SVU" co-star



Yesterday's answer

DOWN

1 Polite

2 44th president

3 Of the kidneys

4 Japanese "thanks"

5 Lo-cal

6 Utter

7 Assert

8 Role for Ford

9 Shake-speare's group

10 Gazed merchant 28 Wyoming's — Range

16 Dardh —

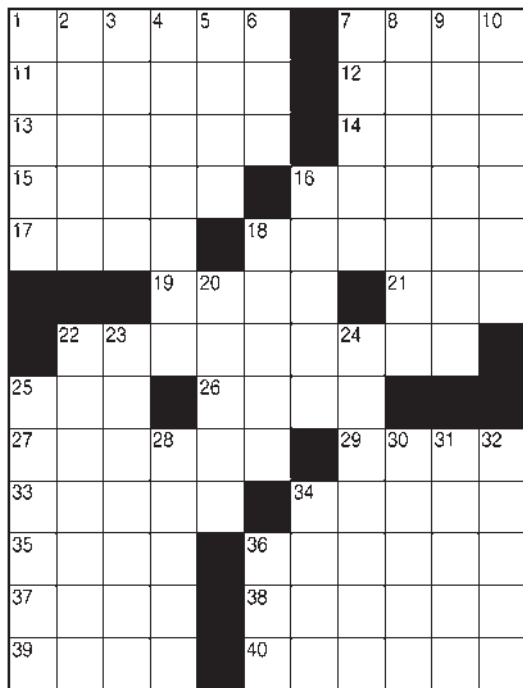
18 Yard tools 30 Loosened

20 Earthy shade 31 Carell of movies

22 Mediterranean wind 32 Writer Blixen

23 Forcible ejection 34 Tarzan's love

24 Capitol feature 36 Went ahead



3-23

AXYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-23

CRYPTOQUOTE

F Z N O M R T M U K W N V I

B T W G I T N , U W S W E T W P A

U T N T P T M P F P T I F Z N .

— N W O Q I B W O A F T K T N U F P

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: I HAVE LEARNED OVER THE YEARS THAT WHEN ONE'S MIND IS MADE UP, THIS DIMINISHES FEAR. — ROSA PARKS

Cruise ship Schedule: Mar 22 - Mar 24 2024

FRI	22	EXPLORA 1	08.00	18.00	1
		VASCO DE GAMA	07.00	23.00	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	06.00	20.00	1
SUN	24	MARELLA DISCOVERY	08.00	20.00	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic—but important—information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

found in homes and establishments.

10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.



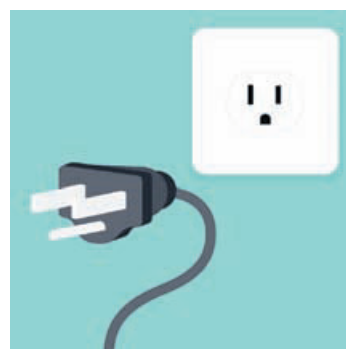
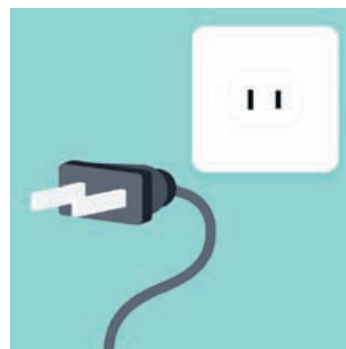
Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly



Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or



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April's total solar eclipse promises to be the best yet for experiments



This photo provided by NASA shows three ASEP rockets at NASA Wallops Flight Facility on Wallops Island, Va., on Feb. 21, 2024, with Mission Principal Investigator Dr. Barjatya, top left, and NASA Mission Manager Jay Scott, top right, and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and NASA personnel.

Associated Press

By MARCIA DUNN
AP Aerospace Writer
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.
(AP) — April's total solar eclipse promises to be a scientific bonanza, thanks to new spacecraft and telescopes and cosmic chance.

The moon will be extra close to Earth, providing a long and intense period of darkness, and the sun should be more active with the potential for dramatic bursts of plasma. Then there's totality's densely populated corridor stretching from Mexico to the U.S. to Canada.

Hundreds if not thousands of the tens of millions of spectators will double as "citizen scientists," helping NASA and other research groups better understand our planet and star. They'll photograph the sun's outer crownlike atmosphere, or corona, as the moon passes between the sun and Earth, blotting out sunlight for up to 4 minutes and 28 seconds on April 8. They'll observe the quieting of birds and other animals as midday darkness falls. They'll also measure dropping temperatures, monitor clouds and use

ham radios to gauge communication disruptions. At the same time, rockets will blast off with science instruments into the electrically charged portion of the atmosphere near the edge of space known as the ionosphere. The small rockets will soar from Wallops Island, Virginia some 400 miles outside totality but with 81% of the sun obscured in a partial eclipse. Similar launches were conducted from New Mexico during last October's "ring of fire" solar eclipse that swept across the western U.S. and Central and South America.

"Time for the biggie! It is pretty exciting!!!" Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's Aroh Barjatya, the rockets' mission director, said in an email.

NASA's high-altitude jets also will take to the air again, chasing the moon's shadow with improved

telescopes to study the sun's corona and surrounding dust.

"Dust sounds boring," acknowledged NASA's eclipse program manager Kelly Korreck. "But at the same time, dust is actually really interesting. Those are the leftover remnants from when the solar system was forming." □



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2 Bed Ocean view \$22,000
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WK 51 Ocean view \$65,000
WK 52 Ocean View \$65,000
WK 7 and 14 - all views

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3 Bed Ocean view \$16,500

Marriott Aruba Ocean Club PLATINUM SEASON

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San Nicolas:

San Lucas: Tel. 584 5119

OTHER

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Blood Bank Aruba 587 0002
Urgent Care 586 0448
Walk-In Doctor's Clinic
+297 588 0539

EMERGENCY

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Noord	527 3200
Sta. Cruz	527 2900
San Nicolas	584 5000
Police Tipline	11141
Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

TAXI SERVICES

Taxi Tas	587 5900
Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

TRAVEL INFO

Aruba Airport	524 2424
American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

AID FOUNDATIONS

FAVI- Visually Impaired
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Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel. 736 2952

Narcotics Anonymous
Tel. 583 8989

Fundacion Contra Violencia
Relacional Tel. 583 5400

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Millennial Money: Navigating the SSI 'marriage penalty'

By DALIA RAMIREZ
of NerdWallet

Jennifer Updike and Lewis Fredette, of Auburn, New York, got engaged in December 2023. The couple, who are both on the autism spectrum, look forward to moving in together soon and tying the knot in a religious ceremony.

But because they both receive Supplemental Security Income commonly referred to as SSI they'll lose about \$300 in combined income monthly if they get married due to the resource limits that the National Council on Disability calls the "marriage penalty." SSI resource limits would also restrict them from having more than \$3,000 in combined savings, \$1,000 less than they could have individually. They're staying engaged indefinitely.

"Our entire decision (to get married) was based upon whether or not we would lose money and how much we would lose," Fredette says.

"We wouldn't have been able to support ourselves with that much money lost," Updike adds.

Updike and Fredette aren't alone. The Social Security Administration reported over 6.5 million SSI recipients over the age of 18 in 2022, the most recent data available. And a 2021 report of U.S. Census Bureau data from 2017 found that most working-age SSI re-



A Social Security card is displayed on Oct. 12, 2021, in Tigard, Ore.

Associated Press

cipients weren't married or had never been married, a stark difference from nonrecipient working-age adults. Though the Social Security Administration, also called the SSA, disincentivizes low-income and disabled couples from getting married, there are ways to tie the knot while minimizing losses.

WHY SSI HAS LIMITS FOR MARRIED COUPLES

"SSI is a needs-based program; It's very similar to welfare," says Steven R. Dolson, an attorney specializing in Social Security disability benefits at The Law Offices of Steven R. Dolson PLLC in Syracuse, New York. It differs from Social Security Disability Insurance,

also called SSDI, which requires enough work history to pay a monthly benefit to people with disabilities who have lost their ability to work.

SSI doesn't need a work history; it's for people with disabilities who have little to no income or resources. But that's not to say these benefits are easy to get.

"Social Security is trying to get people off the rolls constantly," Dolson says. "The theory is to give the minimum amount to sustain them on a day-to-day basis."

The program rules assume that married couples need less per person because they share expenses such

as housing and transportation.

KNOW THE LIMITATIONS

Though you can get married and still collect SSI, there are a few considerations.

First, getting approved for SSI benefits automatically makes you eligible for Medicaid, the national public health care program. "If you exceed the (SSI) resource or income limits, that can knock you off your insurance," Dolson says. "This can have a devastating effect on somebody who's on SSI."

Second, the SSA may count you as married if you act married even if you're not. The SSA considers a couple

"holding out as married" if they share a last name, refer to each other as spouses, file taxes jointly or own a home together. "Holding out" typically applies only in states that recognize common-law marriages, but for SSI specifically, the SSA says it can investigate how a couple presents themselves and change their benefits accordingly in any state.

MAXIMIZE YOUR EXEMPTIONS

According to the SSA, "resources" are anything that can readily be turned into cash, including money in a bank account, personal property and vehicles.

However, some exceptions don't count toward the limit: the home you live in and the land it's on, your household vehicle, household goods and things like wedding rings, burial plots, burial funds up to \$1,500 and life insurance policies up to \$1,500.

The SSA also allows exemptions of "property essential to self-support," which is property, equipment and supplies including buildings and vehicles necessary for a trade, business or job. For people with disabilities, this also includes transportation services, medical devices, service animals and mobility aids.

You can also receive exempted funds through a supplemental (special) needs trust. □

Need to 'borrow' miles from your kid to get that free flight? A big airline will let you do that



A United Airlines Boeing 787 approaches for landing in Lisbon, Sept. 2, 2023, with the setting moon in the background.

Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Don't have enough airline miles for that free flight? United Airlines is now letting people pool and share their frequent-flyer points with family and friends, a feature currently offered by some smaller carriers.

United said Thursday that a "pool leader" can pick up to four other people to set up a joint account in its MileagePlus program. The group leader must be over 18, but there is no minimum age for others, so parents can sign up kids. Everyone in the pool must have their own United frequent-flyer account.

JetBlue Airways, Spirit Airlines and Frontier Airlines already offer pooling, with the rules

varying a bit from one to another.

Frequent-flyer programs remain popular despite complaints that the value of miles and points decline over time because airlines raise the requirements for redeeming them for flights or other items.

The programs are valuable to the airlines by increasing customer loyalty and giving consumers a reason to get an airline-branded credit card. United's credit cards are issued by Chase.

United points are in the middle of the pack for value among programs at U.S. and international airlines, according to a recent analysis by the consumer site NerdWallet. □

Rangers' Langford and Brewers' Chourio to open season in majors. Orioles send Holliday to minors

By STEVE MEGARGEE
AP Sports Writer

Texas' Wyatt Langford and Milwaukee's Jackson Chourio will open the season in the majors.

Jackson Holliday the exciting young Baltimore Orioles infielder won't be joining them in the big leagues just yet.

The Rangers announced Langford will open in the season with them and the Brewers did the same with Chourio, while the Orioles reassigned Holliday to their minor league camp.

Langford, 22, entered Friday with a .388 average, 446 on-base percentage, six homers and 19 RBIs in 49 Cactus League at-bats. The Rangers selected the outfielder out of the University of Florida with the fourth overall pick in last year's amateur draft.

Chourio, who turned 20 on March 11, agreed to an \$82 million, eight-year contract during the offseason despite having played only six games above Double-A. He hit .283 with a .338 on-base percentage, 22 homers, 91 RBIs and 44 steals in 128 games while playing Double-A and Triple-A ball last season.

Heading into Friday, Chourio was hitting .280 with a .333 on-base percentage,



Texas Rangers' Wyatt Langford connects for a run-scoring single against the Chicago Cubs during the fourth inning of a spring training baseball game Sunday, March 17, 2024, in Mesa, Ariz.

Associated Press

no homers and three RBIs in 50 Cactus League at-bats. Holliday, 20, entered Friday having gone 6 for 14 with two homers, six RBIs and two steals in Grapefruit League action. The son of former seven-time All-Star outfielder Matt Holliday was the first overall pick in the 2022 draft.

Holliday batted .323 with a .442 on-base percentage, 12 homers, 75 RBIs and 24 steals in 125 games for four minor league teams from

the Class A to Triple-A levels last season. He primarily played second base and shortstop while also making two appearances at third base.

Baltimore has until April 11 to promote Holliday and be eligible for a prospect promotion pick at the end of the first round of the 2025 amateur draft, such as were earned by Seattle's Julio Rodríguez in 2022 and Baltimore's Gunnar Henderson and Arizona's

Corbin Carroll last year.

A highly-ranked eligible prospect earns a pick for his team for winning Rookie of the Year or finishing among the top three in Cy Young or MVP voting.

RANGERS SIGN LORENZEN

Right-handed pitcher Michael Lorenzen, an All-Star last season, has joined the Rangers on a \$4.5 million, one-year deal that includes \$2.5 million in performance bonuses for innings.

The Rangers made room

for Lorenzen on the roster by putting right-hander Jacob deGrom on the 60-day injured list as he recovers from surgery to his throwing elbow.

Lorenzen went 9-9 with a 4.18 ERA in 29 games with the Detroit Tigers and Philadelphia Phillies last season.

TIGERS OPTION MANNING

The Detroit Tigers optioned right-hander Matt Manning to Triple-A Toledo.

Manning, 26, went 5-4 with a 3.58 ERA in 15 starts last season.

This decision likely means the Tigers will open the season with a rotation including Tarik Stubal, Kenta Maeda, Jack Flaherty, Casey Mize and Reese Olsen.

METS PRAISE MARTINEZ SIGNING

New York Mets players praised the team's agreement with J.D. Martinez on a \$12 million, one-year deal, which is subject to a successful physical.

Martinez, 36, batted .271 with 33 homers and 103 RBIs in 113 games with the Los Angeles Dodgers last season.

"His IQ at the dish is through the roof," Mets first baseman Pete Alonso told reporters.

"He's one of those guys that I consider to be like a hitting savant." □

The number of suspicious tennis matches decreased in 2023

LONDON (AP) — The number of suspicious tennis matches around the world went down for the second consecutive year, and there were none at any of the four Grand Slam tournaments in 2023, according to an annual review by the International Tennis Integrity Agency released Friday.

The ITIA received 101 match alerts which aren't proof of match-fixing but an indication "something inappropriate may have occurred," the agency said in 2023, down from 109 in 2022 and 113 in 2021.

In addition to no such alerts at the Australian Open,

French Open, Wimbledon or the U.S. Open, the ITIA reported none from any 500-

or 1000-level events on the WTA or ATP tours.

There were 41 people sanc-



Tennis balls are stacked on the court at the Western & Southern Open tennis tournament, Saturday, Aug. 20, 2022, in Mason, Ohio.

Associated Press

tioned in 2023 under the Tennis Anti-Corruption Program, including nine who received lifetime bans from the sport, the ITIA said.

At least 16 of those punished last year, four of whom were suspended for life, were investigated in connection with a match-fixing syndicate in Belgium. They were linked to the criminal case of Grigor Sargsyan, the leader of the syndicate.

Jennie Price, chair of the Tennis Integrity Supervisory Board, called that "the most complex corruption case tennis has ever encountered" in Friday's review from the ITIA.

A total of more than 7,200 doping tests were administered in tennis last season, including in- and out-of-competition and blood or urine. Thirteen people were sanctioned last year, although not all were because of tests that took place in 2023.

The most prominent names on the ITIA's list of those sanctions were two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep, for a positive test later determined to have been caused by a tainted supplement, and Jenson Brooksby, for missing drug tests. Both had their original penalties reduced. □

Amid drama around Formula 1, FIA president issues letter to membership defending his leadership

By JENNA FRYER

AP Auto Racing Writer

The head of Formula 1's governing body has issued a passionate defense of his leadership, claiming a pair of whistleblower complaints against him were meant to "destabilize me as President of the FIA, but also of questioning the integrity of our respected organization."

In a letter sent to FIA membership, a copy of which was seen by The Associated Press on Friday, Mohammed Ben Sulayem said the complaints have "shaken the FIA" and created a "period of unprecedented turbulence and challenge."

The ethics committee for the FIA earlier this week cleared Ben Sulayem after an investigation it said lasted 30 days and included interviewing 11 witnesses, including the president.

The FIA had said its compliance officer received two complaints against Ben Sulayem. The first alleged he intervened to overturn a penalty given to Fernando Alonso at last year's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. The second, from the same whistleblower, claimed Ben Sulayem told officials not to certify the Las Vegas circuit for its high-profile race last November.

"These events have unfolded with one clear ob-



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of the Netherlands, center, who qualified for pole position, speaks with FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem after qualification ahead of the Formula One Bahrain Grand Prix at the Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir, Bahrain, Friday, March 1, 2024.

Associated Press

jective: to target the very heart of our leadership and undermine the foundation of our federation," Ben Sulayem wrote to the FIA members. F1 this weekend is in Australia for the third race of the season.

Ben Sulayem was elected president in December of 2021 and is the first Muslim to run the FIA, which is comprised of 242 motoring and motor sport club members in 147 countries. It oversees F1 among other entities and tensions between the

two have been particularly tense of late.

The leadership of Ben Sulayem has been questioned during his entire time at the helm. He tried to enforce a ban on drivers wearing jewelry in their cars, which seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton rebuked and showed up at a 2022 news conference wearing every necklace, watch, bracelet and ring he had with him in Miami.

The FIA also tried to issue a ban on drivers making po-

litical statements. Although many pushed back on that Hamilton said he outright refused to be silenced and even this week called for a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Palestine. Asked Thursday in Melbourne if Ben Sulayem had Hamilton's support as president, the Mercedes driver said "never has."

Hours after Ben Sulayem was cleared by the ethics committee, Susie Wolff announced she had filed a criminal complaint in

France against Paris-based FIA over its brief December conflict of interest investigation into her.

Susie Wolff, who is the head of F1's all-female F1 Academy, was accused of sharing confidential information with her husband, Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff. The Wolffs denied any wrongdoing, and the other nine F1 teams released identically worded statement denying they'd complained about the Wolffs.

The FIA has also been hands-off in the saga at Red Bull Racing, where an employee accused team principal Christian Horner of misconduct. Red Bull's parent company investigated Horner and ultimately cleared him while also suspending the accuser.

The employee has since hired a communications firm, appealed Red Bull's findings to the parent company and lodged a complaint to either the FIA's ethics or compliance committees. Both bodies operate independently from the FIA.

The FIA has refused to comment on whether it is investigating Horner. F1 is not conducting its own investigation into Red Bull, saying that is the job of the governing body. □

Perfect NCAA brackets falling fast, but one person has done the incredible, getting every game wrong



Mississippi State guard Shakeel Moore dunks against Michigan State during the second half of a first-round college basketball game in the NCAA Tournament, Thursday, March 21, 2024, in Charlotte, N.C.

Associated Press

By JIMMY GOLEN

AP Sports Writer

There are 583 people whose NCAA Tournament brackets survived victories by double-digit seeds Oakland, Duquesne and North Carolina State, and exactly one unlucky person who has been perfectly imperfect. Just one of the 22.6 million entries in ESPN's Tournament Challenge had gotten every result wrong through the early games on Friday. That means they took a flyer on No. 16 seed Wagner over top-seeded North Carolina but missed

on the actual losses by third-seeded Kentucky and 6 seeds Texas Tech and Brigham Young.

Florida Atlantic's loss to Northwestern knocked out about half of the perfect brackets that made it through Thursday's games, when only 1,825 survived. The eighth-seeded Wildcats were picked in about 45% of brackets that were still alive on Friday morning.

A record 22.6 million brackets were filled out on ESPN's site, up 15% over last year, with some of the early results knocking out

millions. Mississippi State's 69-51 loss to Michigan State and Brigham Young's 71-67 loss to Duquesne each took out more than 9 million brackets. The biggest upset of the first day, third-seeded Kentucky's 80-76 loss to Oakland, also did some damage: The third-seeded Wildcats were picked in 95% of brackets in the ESPN Tournament Challenge to beat the 14th-seeded Golden Grizzlies. At the NCAA's official site, March Madness Live, only 0.004% of brackets survived after Friday's early games. □